



Supporting Public Lands Education

AMERICAN FRONTIERS/GEOGRAPHY ACTION! 2002 *“America’s Backyard”*

Background

Public lands are one of America’s great treasures. Nearly one-third of the nation belongs to its citizens, a national inheritance unparalleled in the world. As the nation’s urban and suburban populations expand, public lands and open spaces become ever more important to our quality of life. In spite of the importance of public lands, they are unknown to millions of Americans. The combined programs of *American Frontiers* and *Geography Action! 2002* will address this issue by focusing national attention on our public estate through the creation of a series of educational outreach projects and through the adventures of two groups of travelers who will traverse the public lands north and south from Canada and Mexico, staying on public lands for the entire way. Large-scale media and outreach efforts associated with the trek and the educational elements will provide an opportunity for broad national exposure about the role and relevancy of public lands in our lives.

The concept for *American Frontiers* was developed by the Public Lands Interpretive Association (PLIA), a non-profit educational organization based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Since 1981, PLIA has provided more than \$800,000 in funds and services in support of the educational programs of federal public land agencies. *Geography Action!* an ongoing education program of National Geographic Society has reached approximately one and a half million K-12 students through the Society’s National Alliance Teacher Network. The combined program, currently titled *America’s Backyard*, is expected to reach many more Americans and help educate all of us about our great public lands legacy.

Other Formal partners in the American Frontiers project include the Bureau of Land Management, the lead federal agency and the initial funder of the project, the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF), the coordinators of National Public Lands Day, and the other federal public land agencies. In addition, *American Frontiers* has established a “National Partners” program including numerous organizations involved with the uses and management of public lands, such as the American Petroleum Institute, National Ocean Industries Assoc., Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, Leave No Trace, Inc., National Science Teachers Assoc., Western States Tourism Policy Council, and many others.

Education

Education is the most important aspect of *American Frontiers/Geography Action! 2002*. Although the overall educational goals are targeted to a broad national audience, the educational emphasis centers around National Geographic Society’s *Geography Action! 2002* program. At the recommendation of *American Frontiers*, the theme for *Geography Action 2002* is “Public Lands”. This time tested program involves a national network of teachers and educators and has successfully reached thousands of K-12 school children and their families. *American Frontiers*, along with several divisions within National Geographic Society, and other project partners (agencies and organizations) will be involved in the development of the educational elements.

Planned elements include: web based educational classroom resources and activities, printed support materials, teacher training, companion magazine pieces, an online public lands museum, and curriculum kits. Planned trek related educational elements include: back country classrooms, en-route education outreach, web based trek following and daily reports, a filmed documentary, weekly updates on “National Geographic Today”, and updates on National Public Radio’s “Radio Expeditions”.

The Trek

The major component of *American Frontiers*, and an important element of *Geography Action! 2002* is the public lands trek. In August of 2002, two teams of four people each, will start simultaneously from the Mexican and Canadian borders, traversing more than 2,600 miles, staying on public lands the entire way. They will travel on foot, horseback, mountain bike, ATVs and off road motorcycles, in canoes, whitewater rafts, motorboats, and four wheel drive vehicles. The Trek crosses six states including New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. In appropriate locations along the way, special local, community-based events and media activities are planned. A dedication ceremony and the unveiling of a small monument will take place where the two teams meet on September 28th, 2002, National Public Lands Day, in the Wasatch-Cache National Forest near Salt Lake City. The ceremony will be followed by a large Public Lands Day celebration planned nearby.

Funding

American Frontiers/Geography Action! 2002 is a public-private partnership with corporations, non-profit organizations, government agencies, foundations, and individuals providing support through sponsorships, grants, and value-in-kind contributions.

Benefits

By presenting a balanced view of America’s public lands—their history and their uses—*American Frontiers/Geography Action! 2002* helps people better understand the multiple dimensions of public lands. Partners and participants also benefit from exposure to national and global audiences. Sponsors will benefit from the large-scale exposure associated with the many individual projects, products, and promotional activities that will reach millions of participants, creating positive impressions to potential customers.

Public Lands are a unique and truly American concept. Public Lands symbolize the very essence of Freedom in this country. We all share ownership in these lands and with that ownership the shared responsibility to see that these lands are cared for and managed in a way that meets the current and future needs of the American people. *American Frontiers/Geography Action! 2002* will help all of us better realize the full potential of this great legacy.